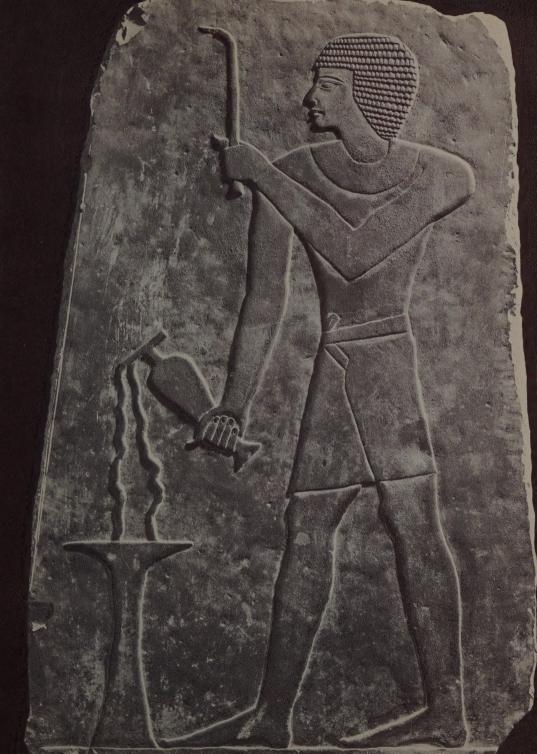


## THE IMAGE IN SCULPTURE

## **FOREWORD**

The purpose of this series of four annual exhibitions is to present a survey of the various aspects of imagery in man's art and how it relates to his world. The first two exhibitions will approach the problem from the point of view of media, specifically, sculpture and painting. The next two exhibitions will concern themselves with the image in different types of artistic expression, namely, religious and individualistic. It is hoped that these exhibitions will provide a rich source of both information and enjoyment for the student body and community.

Relief. Egypt. New Kingdom, 1850 B. C.



## INTRODUCTION

There are two schools of thought regarding the origins of image making in the visual arts. One states that it was the by-product of Paleolithic man's efforts in tool and weapons manufacture. For example, the hunter having developed axe heads in quality and quantity sufficient to his needs indulged in a kind of technical "play" and noticing, perhaps, the similarity between his axe heads and a figure or an animal began creating images. Such images, then, were originally developed and appreciated as form which was functionally determined. The other school of thought maintains that the first so-called works of art were conciously created images resulting from man's unique ability to conceptualize. They feel that such images were intended from the very beginning as manifestations of forces which early men could not comprehend, but wished to influence by means of sympathetic magic. These images, then, were construced in terms of their meaning or content. Whatever the resolution of this argument about the origins of art, very early in its development both of the motivating factors implied in these points of view, form on the one hand and content on the other, became permanently fused as essential elements of what we are now accustomed to calling art. The history of art illustrates that at different times and in different places and in different types of art forms one of these factors may receive areater emphasis than the other, but each is always somehow present. We may surmise from the casts of the tiny Paleolithic examples exhibited that men strove to represent animals and men with a concious sense of imagery at a very early date. While the creative act itself probably provided early artists with satisfaction, the development and extent of early imagery indicates that there was some other motivation. Placement in caves other than those used for living and in anaccessible spots along with evidence of actual or symbolic slaying of such images, infers that they were not primarily decorative, but practically useful in sympathetic magic practices aimed at securing food in the all important hunt. By Neolithic times we may speak of both decorative arts on baskets and pots and of sacred or symbolic arts associated with socio-politico and religious attitudes. The 18th Dynasty Egyptian relief figure is an example of the latter. At the same time, to modern eyes at least, it is decoratively pleasing. This figure exemplifies the conceptual construction of the human image utilized by the Egyptians when dealing with important social, political or sacred personages for 3000 years. The multi-view composition with profile head, front view eye, profile arms, front view torso and profile leas and feet is not the product of an artist who could not draw, so to speak, but a figure constructed for its timelessness; an important aspect of Egyptian art and attitudes which sought to preserve the essentials of this life in the hereafter. In order to do this the artist must produce a figure which has the most head-like of heads, or profile, the most eye-like of eyes, (one which can see) or front view, the most torso-like of torsos, or front view, and so forth and



so on. In short, there is no single moment, no single perspective represented here, but the figure viewed from several points of view in time and space simultaneously as a means of producing an image which will remain useful for all time in the mortuary circumstances where they were usually found. Although few of us are now bound to Egyptian concepts of the hereafter we are still impressed by the validity of the simple line and the vitality it possesses in delineating this timeless figure which tells us much more about the subject than we could hope to observe in a more strictly naturalistic representation.

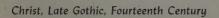
At a glance we might conclude that the copy of the popular Fourth Century B.C. Greek head of Hygeia provides us with a naturalistic representation. Soon, however, we notice that such a head is highly stylized. The cylindrical forehead and bridgeless nose of the classical Greek profile are hardly taken from models in nature, but from Greek ideas about the perfectly beautiful human form. Such simplifications are indeed beautiful in stone and metal being entirely appropriate to the rigid nature of these materials. In the flesh, however, they would appear very strange. The sense of harmony and self contained expression of this piece are likewise appropriate to the Greek view of an orderly universe reduced to the limits of human understanding. Roman examples which lessen classical idealizations and emphasize descriptive data tell us more about the specific individual represented, but less about the nobility of man which was the intangible and profound quality the Greeks sought to reveal in their work.

In the male figure from the Sepik River area of New Guinea we encounter the manifestation of a world view very different from that of the Greeks and their immense humanism. This highly abstracted figure is (as it appears to be) a mask for supernatural forces which the natives of this area feel inhabit their world. Much so-called primitive art is possessed of this feeling for the mask which serves as a residence for supernatural dieties to which men might direct their rites and prayers. If these exotic, fantastic conglomerations of shapes, colors and textures shock us it is because we are viewing them from the perspective of a radically different technological, materialistic and denaturalized culture which makes us prone to forget that the extremity of this type of expression is quite appropriate to the emotional, irrational, so-called prelogical aspects of man's existence to which they refer.

The Late Gothic polychrome wood figure of Christ is a religious image which contrasts sharply with the Sepik River figure. In the place of extreme abstraction there is naturalistic rendition of the figure and drapery. In the place of a spirit of mystery and a certain sense of apprehension there is a feeling of great humanity and the gentleness of a Christ rendered as the human Son of God. Likewise, it may be well to note that the figure of Christ does not propose to be God through giving residence to a supernatural force. Instead it is a sign or symbol which represents an important concept within the Christian tradition. The emaciation of the figure is both a manifestation of the spirituality of Christ and technically of the Gothic subordination of sculpture to arch-



Figure, New Guinea, Sepik River







Angel, Italy, Fifteenth Century

Relief, Burgundian, Twelfth Centu



itecture. This figure, of course, is conceived of in the round and carries with it only a suggestion of the elongation and flatness which figures once had when in stone they adhered to the surface of Gothic cathedrals as much as ascending lines as figures. The small Romanesque relief Angel is from earlier times. It represents a form of Christian art which anthropometrically represents the angel, but makes little other effort to humanize. This disgruntled looking figure is much more of a sign representing an idea than the more corporeal Late Gothic representation of Christ. The angel supports a church (perhaps a chapel to be dedicated) which like itself is weightless, dematerialized, not of the natural order of things. Today we find this literal symbolizing of an idea aesthetically pleasing and in formal principle not dissimilar from simplifications in certain forms on contemporary art. It could not be denied that the sculptor lacks technical skill in naturalistic representation, but then where

does one find an angel for a model.

The kneeling Renaissance polychrome wood angel provides us with an interesting comparison between Renaissance and Medieval attitudes and techniques. Her elaborate dress, classical profile and mechanically hinged wings speak of a highly materialistic and aristocratic view of angels. Many 20th Century viewers tend to place greater value on the technique involved in naturalistic representation than they do on that required to produce the often simpler forms of traditional art such as the Egyptian, Buddhist and Medieval. In truth, it is much more difficult to accurately render concepts of a given tradition into visual form than objects from nature. It is likewise much more difficult for the viewer from outside the tradition and knowing little about it to appreciate such images than it is for him to appreciate naturalistic forms for which his sense experience provides ready models. This is not to say that one cannot appreciate Buddhist art, for example, without becoming a Buddhist. Intellectual understanding is one means of increasing appreciation of such works, but it is also true that the artistic validity of any piece of sculpture depends upon the extent to which the artist is able to transpose his idea or motive into plastic terms whereby form and content become one. The difference between the art forms of traditional societies and the non-traditional art of Post-Renaissance Europe lies in the fact that the forms of the latter are determined by ideas and values of individuals, whereas those of the former are determined by the various concepts of the particular tradition involved which are accepted more or less uniformly by the entire society. Since the Post-Renaissance period has been one in which science has replaced tradition greater emphasis has been placed upon the material world and until recently art forms were much more naturalistic than before. Both points of view are valid in their context and the only danger lies in using the criteria for one when considering the other.

The colonial Spanish head of Saint Francis is reasonably naturalistic and with the added distortions of typical Baroque emotionalism has meaning for a wide audience. One certainly would not have to be from



St. Francis, Spanish Colonial, Sixteenth Century



Madonna, Spanish. Sixteenth Century

within the Catholic tradition to realize what this head tells us about the sensitivity and intensity of Saint Francis. The point of much Baroque religious art was to speak of the important aspects of Catholic Christignity to the large mass of people. The way to do this, of course, is through emotional rather than rational appeal. The Spanish polychrome wood Madonna is of slightly earlier date and provides us with a female counterpart to the figure of Christ mentioned above. The humanizing effects of this piece are somewhat obscured by its condition. Nevertheless, this representation is obviously more the aristocratic mother and child than the Queen of Heaven and the Son of God. It may be interesting to note that the unfortunate splitting of this piece due to the drying out of the block from which it was carved was often avoided by means of cutting the carved block in two, hollowing out the center and rejoining the two halves. Many problems beset the sculptor in wood as one can observe in the pieces exhibited. All things considered, however, they are in remarkable condition having survived fire, flood, worms and incono-

clasm for several centuries.

The 19th and 20th Centuries are too close and too complex to lend themselves to really meaningful generalizations. Quite generally speaking, it might be said that the first half of the 19th Century was dominated by Romanticism and Realism. Both are beautifully exemplified by the Bayre Eagle in this exhibition. The subject is motivated by Romantic notions of flight and freedom. The form is conceived in specifically naturalistic terms. Naturalism as it applies to the representation of objects in nature ends with the Impressionist movement during the last half of the century. The pseudo-scientific Impressionist paints and sculps what corresponds to the retinal image rather than the object outside the viewer. From this point on the major tendencies in the visual arts are towards "inner vision." Two trends appear to dominate these developments during the latter part of the century. One concerns itself with greater and greater simplifications through a process of intellectual abstraction. The other concerns itself with greater and greater distortions of form and media on the basis of emotional expressionism. By the 20th Century these tendencies have developed to an extent which defies description. In the Cremean figures we witness a characteristic fraamentation of forms in conjunction with the use of absurd materials. These are aimed at making us realize something about our reality through the shock of a negative, almost irrelevant statement about it. At the same time the materials evoke an aesthetic response not unlike that to the Sepik River figure. It would be a mistake to overdraw the analogy between these two pieces, however. So-called primitive art (like any traditional art) is not the expression of an idividual, but of a group, and as such possesses no ambiguity for the members of that group who understand and accept it for what it is immediately and without question. The modern piece is intentionally ambiguous for purposes of shocking the viewer out of his conventional way of looking at things in the hope that during those moments of new and unusual perspective he may gain



James Hueter, Twentieth Century American: Walking Girl

insight into the immensity of his reality. The materials utilized in the New Guinea example (which may appear absurd to us) are a manifestation of the primitive view which places man in his close relationship to nature; hence the cowrie shell eyes are a perfectly natural substitution. On the other hand, the materials employed in the modern piece are selected for their very absurdity, again for purposes of shocking us out of our conventional perspective. The great problem of much so-called modern art lies in the fact that it has forsaken the objective world where there are obvious standards for a world of intangibles not unlike that which concerns the primitive artist. The primitive artist has a traditional world view which dictates to him what forms his representations of these intangibles must take. The modern artist is without a traditional view and must develop his own iconography, as it were, at great risk of deceiving himself and others.

In a somewhat different vein, the bronze figure by James Hueter may remind us of classical simplifications, and yet the surprising split image has psychological implications which would not have occured to the classical sculptor. He has combined the severe limitations on form of the classical viewpoint with the shock factor which preoccupies so

many modern artists.

The French psychiatrist Hubert Benoit has constructed an analogy about the paradoxical nature of human existence which has a great deal to do with the transcendental nature of art, language, myth and religion. He says: "Ice is of the same nature as water, but does not possess its properties . . . Man as he is born may be compared to ice, and water to his divine nature . . . in consequence of this man has a conception of himself which is divided and dualistic. The conviction that he is limited remains in his thinking about the information his sense organs supply; the conviction that he is unlimited resides in the depths of his unconcious thought which is the spring of his spontaneous, affective life. And these two ways of thinking are separate so long as man has not attained his full realization, the melting of his ice." Art is one means by which man attempts to melt his ice. If the modern preoccupation with science has led us into a kind of self destructive pessimism about man's fate in the material world, our optimism should be restored by the long view afforded through the pieces in this exhibition which provide impressive evidence of man's continuous efforts to transcend himself.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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